

## Sake from a Champagne Man



**T**his is the first time I've written about sake, even though past Japanese ambassador to Australia, Takaaki Kojima, spent considerable time educating me during his tenure. Tasting outstanding sake at his table convinced me that it's one of the world's great beverages, but time didn't allow me to delve further into the world of sake, save for the occasional indulgence.

Another person who influenced me was Richard Geoffroy when he was chef de cave for Moët et Chandon, overseeing the production of Dom Perignon. Sometimes, when visiting Epernay, I'd taste and discuss champagne with Richard. His frankness and honesty ran counter to the typical PR blurb of the region, and I enjoyed every moment I shared

with him. When he told me he was moving on to make sake in Japan I was momentarily surprised, but quickly realised that Richard felt the time was ripe for another challenge.

However, one simply doesn't cast aside knowledge gained over decades of making champagne. Surely Richard's approach to sake has a touch of Epernay about it. But, apart from fermentation, what?

Blending (assemblage) lies at the heart of champagne, and is so ingrained in Richard that it's virtually part of his DNA. It's unsurprising that he used three different types of rice - Yamadanishiki, Omachi and Gohyakumangoku – from four different sources. The rice is polished to a ratio of 35% (meaning 65% of each rice grain is milled off). That leaves the starchy core which converts to sugar. Low ratios like 35% lead to a “fruiter” aroma and palate in the finished product. Fermentation is carried out with five different yeast strains, including a wine yeast. That makes 60 different components – very much a “methode champenoise” approach.

Many of our readers would never have experienced the joys of premium-quality sake, and some probably view sake as simple alcohol from Japan that is served warm. IWA 5, and similar sakes, should be poured cool, like the best chardonnays. At 15% alcohol, it complements food, just like white wine, but how does it differ? Texture, expressed as viscosity, is a vital feature, as is the fifth flavour sensation (after sweet, sour, bitter, salty) umami.

IWA, in Richard Geoffroy's words, is “at the early stages of what will be a long and exhilarating journey.” No doubt he's correct, but where has his Japanese adventure taken him so far? The answer is in the bottle.

**IWA 5** The colour is quite pale, so the fresh aroma comes as no surprise. With the freshness comes subtlety. Unsurprisingly, there are hints of boiled rice, but a perfumed lift is provided by scents of honeydew melon. This sake comes into its own on a delightfully silky, slightly viscous palate. It differs markedly from white wine in that there is no reliance on acidity, yet it leaves the mouth fresh and longing for more of that seductive umami-ness.

We did the obvious and tried IWA 5 with sashimi tuna and salmon. It was a delightful partner to both, and could be served with a range of foods. Creamed eggs with caviar or salmon roe is one dish that comes to mind. However, like Richard's beloved Dom Perignon, it excels as a special occasion, stand-alone treat. (\$233.00/720ml)

<https://sakeboutique.com.au/collections/sake/products/iwa5>

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